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TAGS: [PREL](#) [XY](#) [IV](#) [NG](#) [GV](#) [CM](#) [MR](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: WEST AFRICA: FRENCH MFA OFFICIAL'S JULY 30  
COMMENTS

REF: PARIS 997

Classified By: Kathleen Allegrone, Political Minister-Counselor, 1.4 (b/d).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: MFA AF Deputy DAS-equivalent Laurent Bigot on July 30 commented on a range of West Africa issues:

-- Cote d'Ivoire: Bigot thought elections were still possible, if not likely, on November 29.

-- Niger: He feared that President Tandja's quest for a third term not only represented a naked bid for power but also demonstrated Tandja's belief that he is Niger's savior.

-- Guinea: Bigot said that Guinea seemed "hopeless" and described CNDD president Moussa Dadis Camara as "crazy but dangerously charismatic."

-- Cameroon: He thought that President Biya would continue to play a low-key, Cameroon-focused approach despite FM Kouchner's recent urging that he display more leadership. During Biya's recent visit to France, Sarkozy reportedly stressed the importance of "democratization."

-- Mauritania: The French are relieved that the elections have taken place free of major problems. Bigot noted that France's shift in policy to be more accepting of Aziz was based on his prior demonstrated willingness to work with France on regional anti-terrorism. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (C) Laurent Bigot provided an overview of several African issues on July 30. (BIO NOTES: Bigot is the deputy to MFA AF/W DAS-equivalent Christine Fages; Fages is the only MFA AF DAS-equivalent who has a deputy. Bigot will replace Fages as AF/W DAS-equivalent on September 1, when Fages becomes the MFA's Deputy Spokesperson, which Bigot described as a highly challenging but prestigious position within the MFA. He said that present spokesperson Eric Chevallier had recommended her about a month ago to FM Bernard Kouchner and that Kouchner had signaled his approval a few days ago. Fages would have become DAS-equivalent for AF/C had this not taken place. Chevallier himself will soon leave to become Ambassador to Syria. END BIO NOTES.)

Cote d'Ivoire

[13.](#) (C) Bigot said that he shared AF A/S-equivalent Stephane Gompertz's relative optimism about the November 29 elections in Cote d'Ivoire (reftel). The electoral process was moving forward, albeit less smoothly than one might like. Nonetheless, Bigot thought that there was nothing that now indicated that the November 29 goal could not be met. He said that one big hurdle would be the publication of the electoral lists, scheduled to take place soon. If the candidates all accept the lists, the Ivoirians will have overcome a major hurdle.

[14.](#) (C) Bigot (please PROTECT for comments in this

paragraph) indicated disapproval that President Sarkozy and FM Kouchner had recently publicly expressed skepticism about the November 29 elections and about President Gbagbo's integrity, which had led Ivoirians to engage in a war of words via the press. Bigot thought that the Presidency's mistrust of Gbagbo stemmed from the fact that Bruno Joubert, Deputy Diplomatic Advisor and Senior Africa Advisor at the Presidency, had been MFA AF A/S-equivalent in November 2004, when the Bouake bombing incident occurred. Bigot thought that that experience may have left Joubert with a permanent mistrust of Gbagbo, which he conveyed to Sarkozy and Kouchner. Although Bigot expressed disapproval over the public statements Sarkozy and Kouchner had made, he conceded that the statements might goad Gbagbo into adhering to the elections timetable, "if only to prove our leaders wrong." He hoped that would be the case.

#### Niger

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¶5. (C) Bigot said that the GOF remained firmly opposed to President Tandja's bid to remain in power, especially since his announcement followed shortly after Sarkozy's visit there, during which Sarkozy was convinced that Tandja would leave power as constitutionally mandated. Bigot said that if Tandja succeeded in obtaining a third term, there would necessarily be a weakening of democracy in Niger, "which will only benefit AQIM and other Sahel terrorist elements." Bigot thought that Tandja was motivated by the age-old reluctance of a dictator to cede power and by his apparent belief that is on some divine mission, that only he can fulfill, to serve as Niger's savior.

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¶6. (C) Bigot also noted that family wealth was involved. Tandja's wife and one of their sons, Bigot reported, had their own private businesses that benefited from having Tandja in power. The son had substantial dealings with China with respect to various natural resource concessions in Niger the Chinese had been accorded. Tandja's remaining in power would help ensure that this financial pipeline did not dry up.

#### Guinea

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¶7. (C) When Guinea was raised, Bigot's first reaction was to describe it as "hopeless." He had been there earlier in the year accompanying Cooperation and Francophonie Secretary of State Joyandet shortly after President Conte's death and CNDD president Moussa Dadis Camara's seizure of power. Bigot had also attended the recent International Contact Group meeting in Conakry. He described the country as being in extremely desperate straits. When asked about Dadis, Bigot's first reaction was to describe him as "crazy." Bigot provided examples of his erratic behavior, including not falling asleep most nights until 5:00 or 6:00 am because of his fear of coups during the night and his waking up in the early afternoon, with no work getting done before 3:00 pm at the earliest. What saved Dadis, Bigot believed, was his very charismatic nature and his ability to command attention as a speaker. This, Bigot said, was a "dangerous quality" given Dadis's other characteristics.

¶8. (C) Bigot said that Joyandet would soon revisit Guinea, in conjunction with a visit to Mauritania to attend President Aziz's inaugural ceremonies, and also to Niger. In Guinea, Joyandet planned to deliver a stern message on the need to move forward on elections in 2009 or else face international condemnation. Bigot was not optimistic about elections in Guinea in 2009.

¶9. (C) Bigot closed by remarking that Dadis's statements about being in power only for a transitory period, his stated desire to put Guinea on the right path, and his stated intention to fight corruption, quite eerily evoked memories of very similar statements Conte made when he came to power, "and we all know what happened after that."

Cameroon

¶10. (C) Bigot said that Cameroon President Biya's visit to France the previous week had gone well. Biya met with several ministers and business leaders. At a January 23 dinner hosted by FM Kouchner, Kouchner urged Biya to play a more active leadership role in Africa, now that he was one of Africa's senior leaders, especially following Gabon President Bongo's passing. At a January 24 lunch, Sarkozy reportedly stressed the importance of democratization in Cameroon as well as elsewhere.

¶11. (C) Bigot said he was not sure that Biya would become more of an activist. His style had long been low-key and focused on Cameroon and not bigger regional or international issues. Biya was not an extrovert seeking the limelight; he preferred playing an "under the radar" role, Bigot believed. Bigot thought that while Biya's low-key style made him a bit invisible, it also served to protect him from the kind of scrutiny that high-profile public leaders (such as Bongo) often attract. Thus journalists did not spend much time digging through his dirty linen and reporting on his personal and family finances as front-page news items as they had with Bongo and others. Bigot suspected that Biya would continue to shun attention and go about his business quietly, as seemed to be his habit.

Mauritania

¶12. (C) As had A/S-equivalent Gompertz (reftel), Bigot expressed relief that the elections had gone fairly smoothly in Mauritania. The picture shifted drastically once Wade's accord was accepted, he noted. "Once that disparate group came to agreement, we thought we were in the clear."

¶13. (C) Bigot confided that the GOF, at both the MFA and Presidency, had initially been strongly anti-coup. That changed over time, he said, as the French military and intelligence services stressed the need to avoid alienating Mauritania and to work with Aziz on counter-terrorism so long as he held power. Bigot said that one key factor was that the French had worked closely with Aziz on PTER issues before the coup, and he had demonstrated a certain reliability and commitment. Bigot said the French shift in policy that took place in December 2008, which resulted in a more tolerant position on Aziz's staying in power (provided that acceptable elections took place at some point), was based largely on his proven willingness to work with France on terrorism.

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